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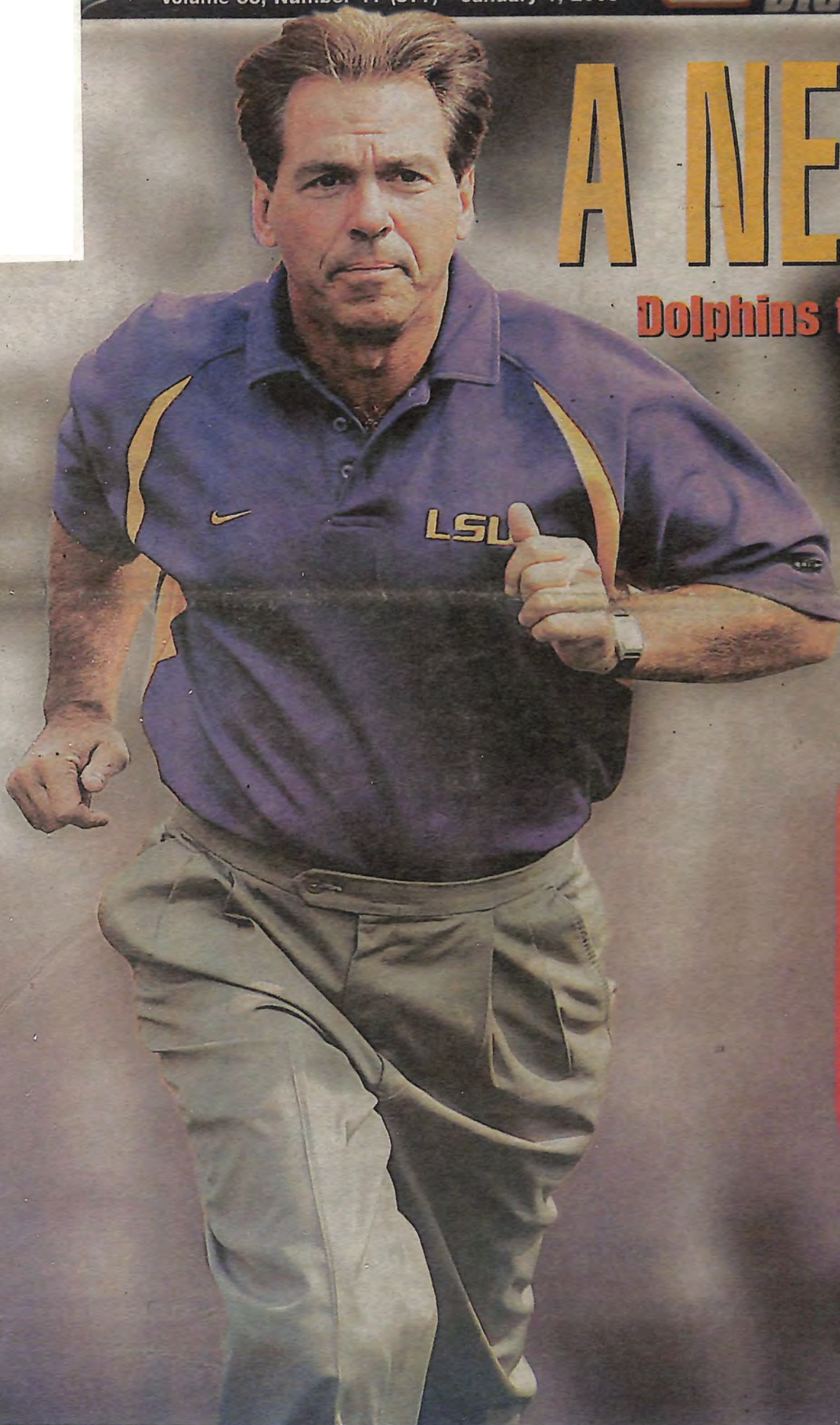
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DIGEST

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A NEW ERA

Dolphins turn to Nick Saban



Inside:

- Why they chose Saban
- Dolphins topple Browns
- Season ends at Baltimore



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Outlook suddenly gets brighter

Admit it. What you really want to know now that Nick Saban has been named the new head coach of the Miami Dolphins is how this translates into wins and losses. The Dolphins are 4-11 after Sunday night's victory



over Cleveland. What will they be at this exact moment next season?

The answer: A whole lot better off.

While it is impossible to predict whether Saban can instantly transform this team back into a legitimate playoff contender, there are some things you can be sure of.

- The offense will have an entirely different new look. Far better organized. Far more diversified. And far better equipped to succeed.

- The defense will possess more of an attack-mode mentality, which has been Saban's signature throughout his coaching career.

- The penalties and the stupid mistakes that have taken so much of the steam out of this year's team will not be tolerated by Saban. Translation: Expect the Dolphins to be a much more disciplined team.

Yes, the face of the Dolphins is about to change. For the better. In so many ways.

Nick Saban is a top-shelf football coach. This is not one man's opinion as much as it is a consensus. For those who grew tired of Dave Wannstedt's laid-back approach, Saban is the antithesis. He is intense. He is no-nonsense. If you catch him smiling, freeze the moment. It won't happen very often. You have two alternatives: do it his way or seek employment elsewhere. It really is very simple.

Sounds a little like that man with the jutting jaw who roamed these sidelines for a lot of years and a lot of victories. No, don't compare Saban and Shula. The bottom line is victories and as of this moment Saban is still 347 behind Shula. Nonetheless, there are similarities in the manner in which they go about their coaching business.

Unlike Wannstedt and a lot like Shula, you get the feeling Saban doesn't care whether his players like him or not. He wants respect. He demands loyalty. He expects results. The Dolphins have replaced a real, genuinely nice man in Wannstedt with more of a drill sergeant in Saban. Could very well be that's exactly what this franchise needs.

Don't be overly concerned by the length of time it took Saban to make his final decision. This is a man who is intensely loyal to his players. If the



Nick Saban left his comfort zone in Louisiana to take the head-coaching job with the Dolphins and will bring plenty of change with him to Miami. Photo/Courtesy of Miami Dolphins

wait was because he wanted to get his LSU players together for their bowl game in Orlando, tell them eye-to-eye before the football world really knew for sure, then how can you fault him for that?

Saban had a wonderful situation in Baton Rouge. He had the city and the school in his palm. It's not easy to say goodbye to that. But it would have been nearly impossible to turn down Wayne Huizenga. Not when you consider Huizenga was handing Saban the keys to the franchise.

This is a dream job for any coach. A flagship franchise. A great city. A hands-off owner. Total control over all football decisions. A five-year guarantee at almost \$5 million a year. Saban said, when accepting the job, that he thrives on challenges. What

greater challenge could he have than these Dolphins and what better tools could he have been given to meet those challenges?

"It is an opportunity," said Saban, "that I just couldn't refuse."

It is no surprise that Huizenga admitted to high-fiving his wife, Marti, when Saban finally let his intentions be known. There was really no clear-cut second choice.

Jim Bates is an excellent defensive coordinator and has done a wonderful job guiding this team through the final weeks of the season. I can only hope that Bates is able to forge a relationship with Saban that will enable him to remain as the defensive coordinator. But the Dolphins needed to hit a home run with this hiring, not a double or triple.

As good as Bates is, it still would have been his first significant head-coaching job and it would present an aura of retaining the status quo. If there is anything this franchise needs, it is change. Major change. Saban certainly represents that.

His arrival will signal an entirely new look in the personnel side of the operation. Rick Spielman either won't be back or will see his role significantly adjusted. Saban will find Spielman's replacement, and we can only hope it is someone who he will listen to and who possesses the experience and knowledge to right some of the wrongs that have occurred over the past few years.

The major concern you hear about Saban and the new structure of the Dolphins football operation is that it is too much power to give one man. While I don't disagree with that thinking, I also believe it can work if Saban trusts this person's decision-making ability and simply serves as the final stamp of approval, similar to the authority that Shula had.

That will be a crucial hire for Saban as will the decision regarding the new offensive coordinator. But, rest assured, the most important hire has already been made.

Nick Saban is the new head coach of the Miami Dolphins. Finally, some good news. Finally, a reason to start the new year with a positive outlook and the strong belief

that we will not have to endure a season like this one again for a long time.

NEXT ISSUE

This is the last of the weekly issues of *Dolphin Digest*. Our regular season recap issue will go to press when some of Nick Saban's key decisions regarding his coaching staff and the personnel department are made. That issue of *Dolphin Digest* will also cover the final regular season game against Baltimore, take a look back at the regular season and a look ahead to the draft and other important issues that this franchise will face during the offseason.



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On the Cover ...

The Dolphins got themselves a nice Christmas present when they hired LSU's Nick Saban to become the sixth head coach in franchise history.

Cover Photo/JAMIE SQUIRE/Getty Images



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Dolphins get their man

A coaching search with a twist

As has been the case with everything in 2004, things didn't go smoothly when the Dolphins began their search for a new head coach.

But at least this one episode had a happy ending, and it just so happened to materialize on Christmas Day.

That's when Nick Saban announced at a press conference in Orlando that he would accept the Dolphins' offer, believed to be for five years and worth roughly \$4.5 million a year.

Saban had agreed in principle on Christmas Eve after meeting with Dolphins owner Wayne Huizenga and team president Eddie Jones in Baton Rouge, La., but Huizenga wasn't taking anything for granted until Saban made the announcement.

That's why, after watching on ESPN Saban confirm he was becoming Dolphins head coach, Huizenga high-fived his wife, Marti.

"I think it is a tremendous challenge for me and a great opportunity and a great choice for me and my family," Saban said.

Saban delayed the announcement of his move until Christmas night because he wanted to tell his players, who were off on Dec. 23 and Dec. 24, in person rather than having them hear the news through the media.

The Dolphins had zeroed in on Saban as their choice to replace Dave Wannstedt on a permanent basis, and declined the opportunity to interview NFL assistants, who are off limits until the end of the regular season.

The other two candidates interviewed were interim head coach Jim Bates, who got strong endorsements from current Dolphins players, and former Raider head coach Art Shell.

The interview of Shell fulfilled the "Rooney Rule," which requires teams to interview a minority candidate to fill a head-coaching position.



Dolphins owner Wayne Huizenga did everything he could think of to lure Nick Saban to Miami, and in the end it proved to be enough.

Digest Photo/KEN KEIDEL

But it was Saban the Dolphins wanted, and they got him by offering him something his previous suitors hadn't: control over personnel matters.

"You look around and say, 'OK, who's out there that's better than that?'" Huizenga told The Associated Press. "I couldn't find anybody."

Saban is expected to bring in after the season a general manager to serve as his right-hand man, much like the structure in New England with head coach Bill Belichick and Vice President of Player Personnel Scott Pioli.

"I have a lot of respect and gratitude for everybody who has been interested in me through the years," said Saban, who was contacted by Chicago and Atlanta last offseason. "I just felt like this opportunity, with this organization, was one of the best that's ever been presented to me in terms of how you can control your destiny in the organization, the commitment the organization has to winning and the tradition that they have in winning."

Saban has been considered one of the top coaches in football — at any

level — for a couple of years now, and he cemented that reputation by leading LSU to a share of the national title in 2003.

At the time he agreed to join the Dolphins, Saban had a 91-41-1 record as a college head coach, including a 48-15 mark at LSU.

He was such a popular figure in LSU, in fact, that boxes of Little Debbie's were left at his front door by LSU fans well aware of his habit of having the snack every morning.

"Nick was touched by a lot of people and he and his family had the best time they've ever had in their coaching career for this five-year period," said LSU athletic director Skip Bertman. "Nick is driven, he is gifted and talented and people like that like to take on new challenges."

Saban, who was scheduled to coach LSU in its bowl game against Iowa on New Year's Day, will take over a Dolphins team that will be coming off its worst season since the 1970 AFL-NFL merger.

The Dolphins also have gone three years without making the playoffs, the franchise's longest drought since 1986-89.

"All I know is that in every situation that we've been involved in, college or pro, we've made a significant contribution to the success of that organization," said Saban, a former NFL assistant with the Houston Oilers and Cleveland Browns. "And not to make comparisons, but we've never taken over successful programs."

"I've always been driven by challenges. I don't care whether it was little league baseball, the pony league to get to American Legion or whatever it was it was always the next challenge that makes driven people want to take advantage of the next opportunity, the next challenge."

Filling out coaching staff next challenge

Now that we know who the head coach is, the next huge challenge is assembling a staff.

Especially an offensive coordinator.

With Nick Saban's expertise clearly on defense, it is imperative that he locate the right man to resurrect the Dolphins offense. As of Sunday night when *Dolphin Digest* went to press, Saban was not giving away any of his plans — and it is likely that he won't make any final decisions until the NFL coaching landscape clears following the end of the regular season.

That's when coaches will be fired and assistants will be available. It wouldn't be surprising to see Saban hire a highly visible offensive coordinator, perhaps even someone with head-coaching experience. Then Saban can turn his attention to both the defense and the big picture of running the Dolphins.

It is expected that Saban will strongly consider

retaining at least a few members of the current Dolphins coaching staff, most notably interim head coach Jim Bates as the defensive coordinator. Saban and Bates worked together on the Browns staff years ago and they have remained good friends.

Would Bates be receptive to a step back or would he want to first pursue other coaching possibilities? That remains an unknown. Bates did say prior to the Saban announcement, "I wasn't sure what it (being a head coach) was going to be like, but now I know it's something I really enjoy."

If Bates returns as defensive coordinator, he could have a say in the defensive staff, which should include at least one or more members of the current staff. Saban did say when he announced he was taking the Dolphins job, "I think if we talk about it, we'll know if it works for both of us."

It is not expected that Saban will retain anyone from the offensive staff, which lacked continuity this season partly because of some in-house squabbling. Current offensive coordinator Chris Foerster was given the job only after Joel Collier had to step aside due to health reasons. Collier retained his old job as running backs coach.

The Dolphins have two former offensive coordinators on the current staff — Marc Trestman and Jerry Sullivan — and neither played a significant role in this year's offense.

It is possible that Saban could bring along staff members currently on his college staff. Among the more prominent staff members at LSU are offensive coordinator Jimbo Fisher, defensive coordinator Will Muschamp, assistant head coach/special teams Derek Dooley and associate head coach/receivers Bobby Williams.

DEFENSE IS HIS CALLING CARD

Nick Saban's track record as a college head coach, including a .688 winning percentage and a share of the national title in 2003, has been well documented.

And those who have followed Saban's career know that a great part of his success has been his ability to produce great defenses.

Saban's experience as an NFL assistant came as a secondary coach and later a defensive coordinator, so it only made sense his teams at Michigan State and LSU would be particularly good on that side of the ball.

LSU captured a share of the national title last year primarily on the strength of a defense that led the nation in fewest points allowed (11.0 per game) and fewest total yards allowed (252.0 per game).

The Tigers also set a school record with seven defensive touchdowns, including a 20-yard interception return by defensive end Marcus Spears that proved the winning margin in the 21-14 victory over Oklahoma in the Sugar Bowl.

Saban's style of defense is physical and aggressive. The Tigers have done a lot of blitzing under Saban, and the evidence comes in the fact that 20 of the team's 51 sacks last season were recorded by linebackers or defensive backs.

This year, it was 12 of 36. By comparison, only 5.5 of the Dolphins' 44 sacks in 2003 were recorded by linebackers or DBs, and this year's numbers through 14 games were 8 of 34.

Saban also had success defensively at Michigan State, with his 1999 team leading the Big Ten Conference in rushing defense and sacks.

"Instead of looking at the overall picture, he gives his players something they can really sink their teeth into, which allowed them to play more aggressively," said Dean Pees, the head coach at Kent State who served as a defensive coordinator under Saban. "There are a lot of guys who can draw up defenses in the dirt and draw X's and O's. The question is what little things can you find to help each player

play his position? That's one thing Nick is good at."

As one would expect from a coach with a defensive background, Saban is rather conservative on offense. At least, that's what the statistics would seem to indicate.

Over the past three seasons, LSU has run the ball on 61.6 percent of its offensive plays. That's a much higher percentage than the Dolphins' percentage the last three seasons under Dave Wannstedt, who was considered by many of his detractors as an overly conservative coach.

Yet, LSU set all sorts of offensive records during its national championship season in 2003, such as passing touchdowns (30), offensive touchdowns (56), completions (255), first downs (298) and total yards (5,857).

"He believes in an exciting and up-tempo offense," said Colts president Bill Polian, "and yet his teams are always terrifically sound and very physical."

SABAN AS HEAD COACH TOLEDO

Year	Record	Bowl
1990	9-2	

MICHIGAN STATE

1995	6-5-1	Lost to LSU (45-26) in Independence Bowl
1996	6-6	Lost to Stanford (38-0) in Sun Bowl
1997	7-5	Lost to Washington (51-23) in Aloha Bowl
1998	6-6	
1999	9-2	Resigned before bowl game

LSU

2000	8-4	Beat Georgia Tech (28-14) in Peach Bowl
2001	10-3	Beat Illinois (45-30) in Sugar Bowl
2002	8-5	Lost to Texas (35-20) in Cotton Bowl
2003*	13-1	Beat Oklahoma (20-13) in Sugar Bowl
2004	9-2	vs. Iowa (Citrus)

*won share of national championship



Nick Saban's teams traditionally have played strong defense. Photo/CHRIS GRAY/THEN/Getty Images

College to pros a tough jump

Dolphins defensive end Jay Williams expressed his concern before the hiring of Nick Saban about going after a college coach because he had a bad experience with that exact scenario during his days with the St. Louis Rams.

Williams was starting his second season with the Rams when they hired Oregon head coach Rich Brooks to replace Chuck Knox. Brooks, who had had tremendous success in 18 years at Oregon, flopped. The Rams went 7-9, then 6-10, and just like that Brooks was gone.

"I liked him," Williams said. "But when he came, he came with that college mentality. That's not what we need. We need direction and a few players. I don't think this team needs a disciplinarian."

Brooks isn't the only successful college coach who has failed at the NFL level, and others like him include names such as Steve Spurrier and Butch Davis.

But there also have been several success stories. Dennis Green made the playoffs on a regular basis after going from Stanford to the Minnesota

Vikings in 1992. Steve Mariucci had tremendous success with the 49ers after going straight from Cal to San Francisco. And Bobby Ross guided San Diego to its only Super Bowl appearance in his third season with the Chargers after coming straight from Georgia Tech.

All of those coaches had been NFL assistants before going back to college, but Jimmy Johnson had no NFL experience when he jumped from the University of Miami to the Dallas Cowboys in 1989. After a disastrous 1-15 finish in his first year in Big D, Johnson had the Cowboys winning back-to-back Super Bowls in his fourth and fifth seasons.

Look back at those who have gone from college head coach to NFL head coach over the past 15 years, and it's pretty much split down the middle in terms of those who went on to have winning percentages at the pro level and those who did not.

"The only thing I say is college coaches come in and they try and try," said Cleveland Browns interim head coach Terry Robiskie, "and some make it and some don't."

THE BIG JUMP

Nick Saban is the latest coach to go straight from the college ranks to becoming an NFL head coach. Those who have preceded have had mixed results at the pro level. Here's a look at the coaches who have made the jump in the past 15 years, with their records during their last year in college, their first year in the NFL and their NFL career.

WITH PREVIOUS NFL EXPERIENCE

Coach	Year	College	Last year	NFL team	First year	NFL career
Dick MacPherson	1991	Syracuse	7-4-2	New England	6-10	8-24
Dennis Green	1992	Stanford	8-3	Minnesota	11-5	102-71*
Bobby Ross	1992	Georgia Tech	8-5	San Diego	11-5	77-68
Rich Brooks	1995	Oregon	9-4	St. Louis	7-9	13-19
Tom Coughlin	1995	Boston College	9-3	Jacksonville	4-12	77-73*
Steve Mariucci	1997	California	6-6	San Francisco	13-3	67-59*
Butch Davis	2001	Miami	11-1	Cleveland	7-9	24-35
Dennis Erickson	2003	Oregon State	8-5	San Francisco	7-9	9-21*

WITH NO PREVIOUS NFL EXPERIENCE

Jimmy Johnson	1989	Miami	11-1	Dallas	1-15	89-68
Barry Switzer	1994	Oklahoma	9-3**	Dallas	12-4	45-26
Dennis Erickson	1995	Miami	10-1	Seattle	8-8	31-33*
Mike Riley	1999	Oregon State	5-6	San Diego	8-8	23-41
Steve Spurrier	2002	Florida	10-2	Washington	7-9	12-20

*Through 14 games this season.

Note that Erickson's record was separated into his stints with Seattle and San Francisco. His overall NFL record through 14 games this season was 40-54.

**Switzer's last year at Oklahoma was in 1988 and he was out of coaching for five years before he was hired by Dallas.

SOUNDBITES ABOUT SABAN

What they're saying on the hiring of Nick Saban:

Defensive end Jason Taylor: "I don't care. It doesn't matter. I don't know Nick Saban. I know nothing about him. I just want to finish the season on a positive note. We'll take care of next season next season."



Don Shula: "Wayne Huizenga made a good selection. This is also a great opportunity for Nick Saban. He's been a winner everywhere he's been and that's something that gets your attention."

Interim coach Jim Bates: "I know Nick is with me and I am with him, and we're good friends. We will talk. I know we will talk. It was Wayne's decision to make and he decided to go with Nick. I have to support that. I still believe I can handle this job. There is no doubt in my mind I can do this type of work."

Linebacker Zach Thomas: "They are paying him big money, so he must be pretty good. Everybody says he's a disciplinarian and that's fine. There is different ways of coaching. I believe Coach Bates will be a hell of a coach someday, but I'm



selfish and hope he doesn't leave. I like his schemes. That would be a good one-two punch with both of them (Saban and Bates) working together. Look at all the teams that have been shooting for Saban, and he's turned them down. That shows how great a coach he is."

Quarterback A.J. Feeley: "I faced Coach Saban in my first start at Oregon State when he was at Michigan State. I hear he's a great coach who expects to win. Other than that, I really don't know much about him."



Defensive tackle Josh Shaw, who played for Saban at Michigan State: "He demands perfection from everybody, his players, his coaches and everybody around him. Everybody has to take care of his responsibilities. That's what he stressed. He always looked out for his players, so I always thought he was a players coach."

Center Seth McKinney: "I heard he's a detail-oriented guy. That's the kind of guy I like. I'm sure he's going to do a good job for us. That's what he's done everywhere he's been."



Defensive end Jay Williams: "I don't know anything about him. I don't follow college football that much. I think it would be great to keep Coach Bates, but I think someone is going to scoop him up."



Wide receiver Marty Booker: "From what I hear, he's supposed to be one of the best, so we'll see. You get a new coach, you really don't know what to expect; it's like starting all over again. I'm a little skeptical. The last time I got a new coach, I got traded."



Wide receiver Chris Chambers: "I don't have much reaction. I'll have more after the season. We have one more game with Coach Bates and we'll go from there. I got recruited by (Saban) at Michigan State. I remember meeting him. I was young and I didn't think much of it."



Dolphins' coaching legacy

Nick Saban is only the sixth coach in the 39-year history of the Miami Dolphins. A look at those who preceded him



George Wilson
1966-69
Record: 15-39-2



Don Shula
1970-95
Record: 274-147-2



Jimmy Johnson
1996-99
Record: 38-31



Dave Wannstedt
2000-04
Record: 33-27



Jim Bates
2004
Record: 3-3



Nick Saban
2005 - ?
Record: ?

Reality: Saban hired Dolphins

"Twas the night before Christmas and all through the house, not a creature was stirring. Not even a mouse. The stockings were hung by Wayne's chimney with care. In hopes that St. Nick soon would be there."



Wayne Huizenga's holiday wish list was granted. So what if it took a little longer than the Dolphins organization would have preferred. The franchise has experienced a long Christmas Day in the past — Kansas City, 1971, double overtime.

Turkey dinners were all dried up by the time they were devoured on that day.

That had to be the case in the Huizenga household Saturday.

He had to spend Christmas Eve shlepping — on second thought, Wayne doesn't shlep — burning fuel on his private jet on a round-trip excursion to Baton Rouge. Rumors were rampant that Nick Saban was going to turn down the coaching job with the Miami Dolphins.

Huizenga and team president Eddie Jones saved the day.

Saban hired them.

Yes, Nick Saban hired the Miami Dolphins.

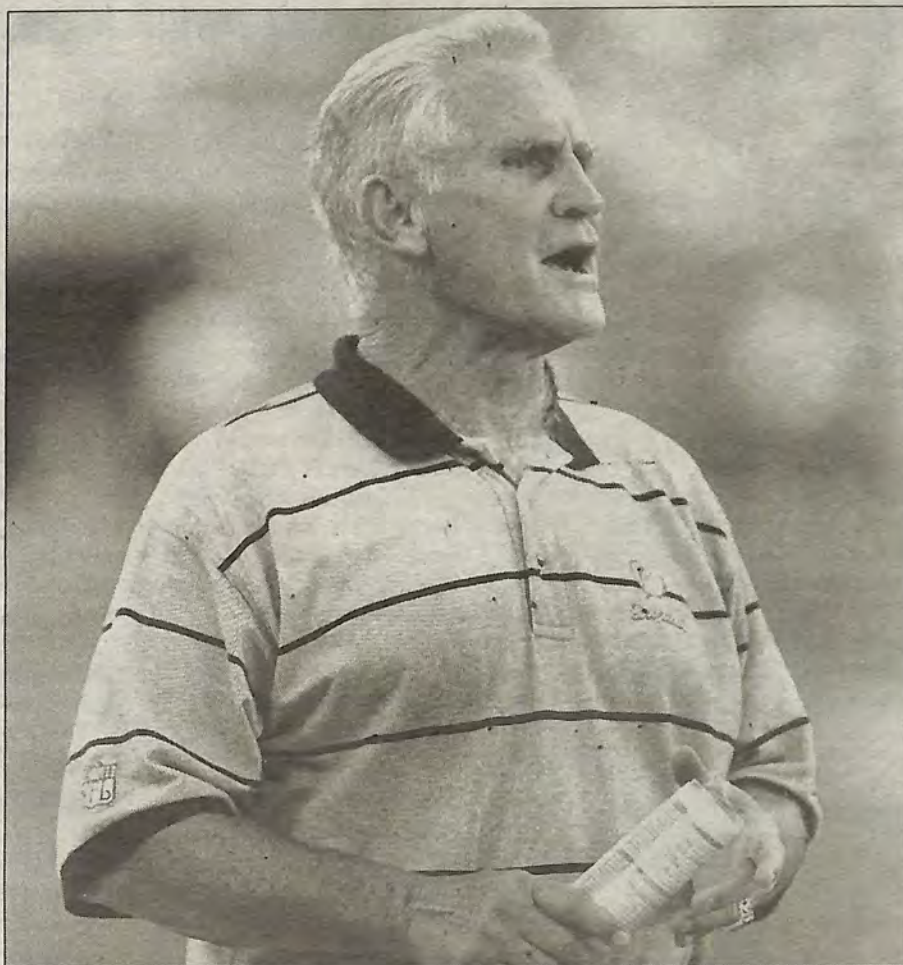
Saban first chose Miami about a year ago. If Dave Wannstedt had not been retained, he would have come after the job at the conclusion of last season.

In the sessions with Huizenga and Jones over the past two weeks, who might have asked the most pertinent questions? Saban was the only X's and O's guy in the room.

And he obviously received the right answers in three key areas.

Five years, more dollars than were originally presented, and total control.

Total control means just that, and,



New Dolphins coach Nick Saban most likely will keep a very structured schedule, as former head coach Don Shula always did.

Digest Photo/KEN KEIDEL

unless the team is sold, he will not have an owner looking over his shoulder.

Huizenga will drop by the facility from time to time for a friendly chat just to see how things are going and to inquire if the coach needs anything.

Based on the new coach's reputation for abnormally stringent personal work habits, Wayne might have to make an appointment and there will be a time limit.

When I co-hosted Jimmy Johnson's and Wannstedt's radio shows, they always had some extra time for unrelated conversation. That was much different than the experience with Don Shula, whose schedule was al-

ways very strict and very structured.

Saban will set the communication rules, as well. The days of media access to the assistant coaches are likely over. His former boss, Bill Belichick, and his former boss' boss, Bill Parcells have denied it.

Even his first presser was reminiscent of Shula's, characterized by "I already answered that," only without the glare.

As further evidence that Saban hired the Dolphins, he staged the announcement. Generally, when the coach is hired, the team schedules the release of the story.

Shula's arrival in 1970 was totally unexpected. Then-Miami owner Joe Robbie invited the media to the

Jockey Club for the announcement. Of course, it was a different time. No ESPN. No agents as sources. When Shula walked into the cocktail reception — Joe Robbie was a terrific owner in many ways — it was the first inkling that anybody, including the publicist, had.

Now that Saban has hired the Dolphins, his next hires will be even more important, starting with the general manager. If Floyd Reese can't be lured from Tennessee, Tim Ruskell, the Atlanta assistant GM, is a candidate.

The new coach in charge of everything has been out of the league for 10 years. That was pre-salary cap. Scouting was far less sophisticated. Truth be told, the Dolphins' scouting has been staffed somewhat on the cheap. It needs to be upgraded, expanded and brought up-to-date, according to knowledgeable observers.

The coaching staff is an equally critical area. It's well known that Saban and Jim Bates are friends. Bates visits with the Sabans every summer. He could do a lot worse than to retain Bates as his defensive coordinator, although the interim coach has performed well enough to be considered for a permanent head coach job's elsewhere.

Additionally, every coach or manager in every sport wants somebody he trusts around him to watch his back, as well as execute the normal chores.

Current quarterbacks/assistant head coach Marc Trestman would be a strong choice as offensive coordinator. He has coordinated Super Bowl offenses, one as recently as two years ago (Oakland). He truly understands the passing game, which, with rule changes and the evolution of the West Coast offense, has also advanced since Saban left the league.

Saban does have the resources to be touted on to the right people. How he will do is uncertain. The certainty is that life according to St. Nick will be different.

A belated "Merry Christmas to all, and to all a good night."

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DOLPHIN DATA

2005 opponents all determined

With one game left in the 2004 season, the Dolphins' opponents for next year are set now that last place has been determined in most AFC divisions.

Every team's list of opponents has been announced through 2009, but two games every year are determined by final standings.

As the last-place finisher in the AFC South, Tennessee will join Denver, Kansas City, Atlanta, Carolina and the other AFC East teams as the Dolphins' home opponents. The Dolphins will travel to last-place Cleveland, in addition to predetermined trips to Oakland, San Diego, New Orleans, Tampa Bay, along with the Jets, Bills and Patriots.

For those looking even further ahead, in 2006 the Dolphins will face every team from the AFC South and the NFC North.

A RECORD UPSET: It may not have been viewed as the greatest upset in NFL history, but in a way the Dolphins' 29-28 victory over New England was just that. The Dolphins became the first team to beat an opponent that had 10 more victories coming into the game. The previous biggest win differential was eight, which was done three times — most recently by Indianapolis (0-10) against Green Bay (8-2) in 1997.

TOP TIGHT END: It didn't generate much publicity, but **Randy McMichael** officially achieved the greatest receiving season by a Dol-



McMICHAEL



FREEMAN



TURK



WANNSTEDT

phins tight end during that victory over New England. McMichael, who already had set the team record for receiving yards for a tight end, added the mark for catches in a season with his four receptions in the Monday night thriller. **Keith Jackson** held the previous mark in both categories.

PRACTICE MOVE: The Dolphins released DE **Shawn Johnson** from the practice squad last week, leaving them with the following seven players

— WR **Ronald Bellamy**, DE **Ronald Flemons**, RB **Leonard Henry**, T **Tony Pape**, S **Ricky Sharpe**, G **Jamil Soriano** and WR **J.R. Tolver**.

FORMER DOLPHINS NEWS: New England special teams ace **Larry Izzo** was selected to the Pro Bowl for the third time in his career. ... FB **Stanley Pritchett** was placed on injured reserve by the Atlanta Falcons. ... New England waived DB **Omare Lowe** a couple of days after re-signing him.

BIG BUMP: Interim head coach **Jim Bates** did some chest-bumping with safety **Arturo Freeman** after Freeman's game-clinching interception against New England, so the 57-year-old was asked the next day if he was sore. Said Bates: "Nah, I was worried about hurting Arturo."

O CANADA: The Dolphins gave workouts last week to 10 players from the Canadian Football League. The list consisted of halfback **Kenton Keith**; defensive backs **Chris Torrillo** and **Greg Golden**; tackles **Luke Fritz**, **Fred Moore** and **Konta Woodard**; and wide receivers **Arland Bruce**, **Zack Fletcher**, **D.J. Flick** and **Brock Ralph**.

TURK SHOOT FOR TOP: The Dolphins don't have many players among the statistical leaders around the league or even the AFC, but punter **Matt Turk** has a chance at finishing with the best net average in the conference. He entered last weekend's games tied for first with San Diego's **Mike Scifres** at 38.4. Turk averaged only 34.5 last season.

FINAL THOUGHTS: The Dolphins are 22-16 in regular season finales, including three victories in their last four. ... The Dolphins' most frequent opponent in regular season finales has been New England at nine times, followed by the Jets at eight times. Miami is 4-5 against the Pats and 3-5 against the Jets.

ROSTER MOVE: The Dolphins signed linebacker **Billy Strother** off Washington's practice squad to take the place of **Renaud Williams**, who sustained a broken wrist in the New England game.

Wannstedt going back to college

Dave Wannstedt is back in coaching. A change of heart led him to decide to accept the job as head coach at the University of Pittsburgh, where he played and served as an assistant under Johnny Majors in the 1970s.

Wannstedt initially had withdrawn his name from consideration just a week earlier, saying the time wasn't right. He also was undecided whether to pursue another NFL job or perhaps work as a TV analyst. Wannstedt did color commentary for FOX on the Dec. 12 game between San Francisco and Arizona and did well enough that FOX had scheduled him to work the Jan. 2 game between Detroit and Tennessee.

"Yeah, I'm going to do it," Wannstedt, a native of Pittsburgh, told ESPN.com. "The more I thought about it and talked it over with (wife) Jan, I realized that this was the right job for me at this stage of my career. Jan said, 'Who are you fooling about doing TV? You're a coach. Let's go home.'"

Injury Update ...

QB **A.J. Feeley** continues to take shots, and he had to leave the Sunday night game against Cleveland for one play after being hit by a defensive lineman.

WR **Marty Booker** left the game in the third quarter after sustaining an ankle injury when he was tackled.

DE **Jay Williams** left the game with a knee injury in the first half, but he later returned.

LB **Zach Thomas** was back in the starting lineup after missing the previous three games because of a hamstring injury.

C **Seth McKinney** was considered a question mark all week leading up to the game, but he took his place in the starting lineup.

But the Dolphins again were without LB **Eddie Moore**, who missed his second consecutive game because of injuries to his calf and knee. Moore was the only Dolphins player on the inactive list because of an injury.

The other inactives were WR **Maurice Mann**, CB **Jimmy Wyrick**, FB **James Lynch**, S **Deandre Eiland**, G **Greg Jerman** and T **Wade Smith**.

The others on the injury list last week who played against Cleveland were DE **David Bowens** (back), Feeley (pectoral), CB **Sam Madison** (calf), K **Olindo Mare** (calf), TE **Randy McMichael** (ribs), LB **Derrick Pope** (hand) and T **John St. Clair** (ankle).



Taylor sole Pro Bowl pick

The Dolphins weren't expecting to have many of their players selected to the Pro Bowl, but at least they didn't get shut out.

Jason Taylor was chosen as the Dolphins' lone representative, as he joined the Jets' John Abraham and Indy's Dwight Freeney as the AFC defensive ends.

"I was surprised," Taylor said. "We haven't won many games this year. You know a lot of times, when it comes to Pro Bowl stuff, it's a numbers game. I didn't expect it, but I'm honored and appreciative of it."

Tight end Randy McMichael and cornerback Patrick Surtain were chosen as first alternates, Brendon Ayanbadejo was a second alternate as a special teams player, while linebacker Zach Thomas was a third alternate.

McMichael appeared early in the season to be on his way to the Pro Bowl, but his numbers decreased and fell considerably short of those of San Diego's Antonio Gates and Kansas City's Tony Gonzalez, the two selections at tight end.

Thomas, meanwhile, saw his chances disappear because of a hamstring injury that has sidelined him for over a month.

The one selection represents the Dolphins' worst Pro Bowl showing since 1998. The Dolphins have been shut out twice, in 1980 and 1997.

DOLPHINS EXCLUSIVE



DOLPHINS DONATE TOYS TO CHILDREN

Trying to spread a little joy and cheer during this holiday season, Miami Dolphins players Tony Bua, Larry Chester, Jason Garrett, Rex Hadnot, Leonard Henry, Reggie Howard, Jamar Martin, Jeno James, Randy McMichael, Seth McKinney, Ed Perry, John St. Clair, Zach Thomas, Jay Williams, Quintin Williams, Shawn Wooden, Jeff Zgonina, strength and conditioning coach John Gamble and assistant equipment manager Charlie Thiele donated and distributed toys to children at Kids in Distress in Ft. Lauderdale and Hurwit Crisis Nursery in Miami.

Kids in Distress provides therapeutic services to abused and neglected children placed at the center and intensive in-home services to families at risk of child abuse and neglect.

The Hurwit Crisis Nursery is part of the Family Resource Center, which serves as an emergency shelter for children who have been abused and neglected. The Crisis Nursery Program, a United Way agency, accepts kids who range from birth to 12 years old.



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DOLPHINS PLAYERS AND CHEERLEADERS SERVE DINNER TO RESIDENTS AT THE BROWARD PARTNERSHIP FOR THE HOMELESS

Miami Dolphins wide receiver Bryan Gilmore and running back Vick King, along with Dolphins Cheerleaders Danielle and Randi, served a holiday meal to residents at the Broward Partnership for the Homeless in Ft. Lauderdale on Wednesday, December 22. The hams that were served were generously donated by Publix. After dinner the players and T.D. signed autographs and took pictures with the residents.



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Dolphins Auctions, the online NFL auction site, features unique one-of-a-kind items signed by Dolphins players to raise money to help support children's charities in South Florida. In addition to the autographed memorabilia, Dol-Fans have the opportunity to bid on Dolphins game used items.

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Miami 10, Cleveland 7



Linebacker Zach Thomas enjoyed his return to the lineup after missing three games with a hamstring injury and had a team-high 18 tackles against the Browns.

Digest Photo/KEN KEIDEL

what went right

- Cleveland had a chance to take a 10-7 lead in the fourth quarter, but Phil Dawson, who came into the game 19-of-23 on field goals this season, hit the right upright on a 43-yard attempt.
- After Olindo Mare's game-winning field goal with seven seconds left, Cleveland's Richard Alston grabbed the ensuing kickoff at the 9-yard line and sprinted to the 15 before going to his knees. That gave Cleveland one desperation shot with four seconds left, instead of trying its luck on a long return from Alston, who has a kickoff return for a touchdown this season.
- The Dolphins were backed up at their 2-yard line in the second quarter after recovering a Cleveland fumble, but they got a break on first down when Browns defensive lineman Orpheus Roye jumped off-side. The Dolphins wound up getting first five downs on the drive before punting.

what went wrong

- There weren't a lot of reasons for viewers to tune in to ESPN to watch this game, but the Browns and Dolphins did little to make it enjoyable for those who did. Many fans at Pro Player Stadium also left after halftime.
- The Dolphins were called for two illegal-formation penalties — once on a punt when flyer Wes Welker failed to line up inside the yard-line number, and again when tight end Randy McMichael moved back at the line of scrimmage and no one else moved up to cover the tackle.
- The Dolphins missed an opportunity at another takeaway on defense when Browns running back Lee Suggs fumbled near the sideline but linebacker Brendon Ayanbadejo touched the ball after sliding out of bounds. That automatically gave Cleveland the ball.
- The Dolphins tried a pooch punt from field goal formation in the third quarter, but the move backfired when Cleveland returned the 19-yard punt for 17 yards.

fast facts

Dolphins' record: 4-11

This time last year: 9-6

Stat worth noting: The Dolphins' turnover ratio of plus-2 marked the third consecutive game they were at plus-2 or better after not reaching that figure once in the first 12 games.

Turning point: The Browns appeared headed for a game-winning score in the final minutes when they had a first down at the Miami 49, but a sack by David Bowens ended the threat and the Dolphins then drove for the game-winning field goal.

Play to remember: Cleveland was threatening in the second quarter when Lee Suggs fumbled at the 2-yard line on a second-and-goal play. Sammy Knight not only forced the fumble but also recovered it.

Play to forget: Arturo Freeman picked off a deep Luke McCown pass in the third quarter, but it turned into a bad play for the Dolphins after Freeman lateraled to Patrick Surtain, who lateraled to Sam Madison, who fumbled the ball away to the Browns after a short return.

Second-guessing time: This was a game between two 3-11 teams, so why, oh why, did the Dolphins punt on fourth-and-1 from the Cleveland 48 with 38 seconds left in the first half? Even had the Dolphins not converted, it's not as if the Browns have a high-powered offense that undoubtedly would have taken advantage of the field position.

what they said

"The defense picked up the game tonight. It was an ugly win. But we will take them any way we can right now."

— RB SAMMY MORRIS

"This was a long and disappointing year. These past couple of weeks you see the character this team has."

— CB PATRICK SURTAIN

by the numbers

38: Carries by Cleveland running back Lee Suggs, which tied the record for a Dolphins opponent (set by Washington's John Riggins in Super Bowl XVII). The total also helped Suggs break Jim Browns' Cleveland record.

2: Number of drives, out of 12, Cleveland started with a passing play.

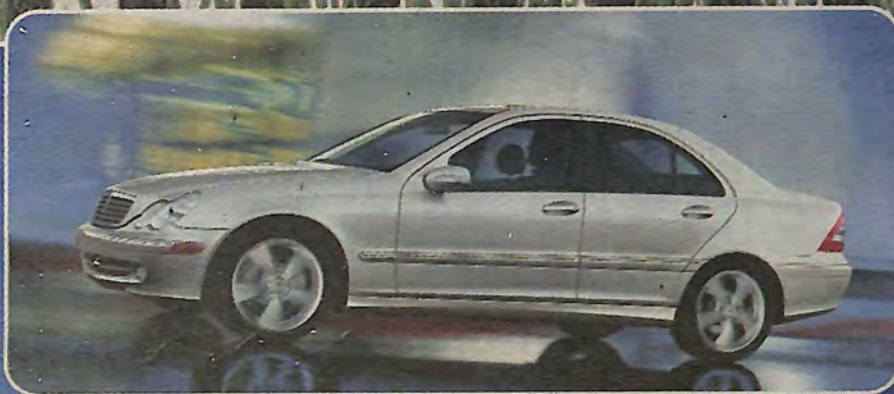
8: Completions by Dolphins quarterback A.J. Feeley that resulted in gains of 5 yards or less.

7: Number of Miami drives, out of 12, that reached Cleveland territory.

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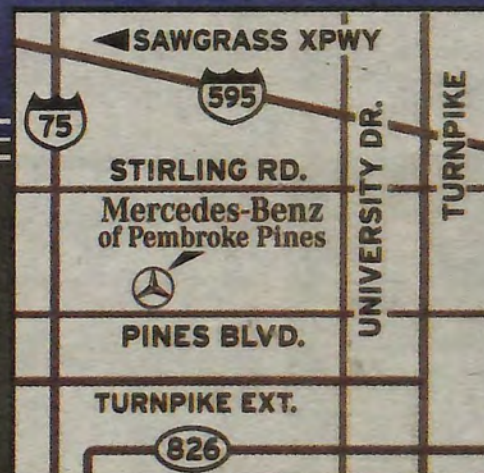
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DOLPHINS REPORT CARD

Game No. 15 • Miami 10, Cleveland 7

QUARTERBACKS

A week after having his best game of the season in the big victory over New England, A.J. Feeley had a rather mediocre performance against Cleveland. Feeley completed 25 of his 43 attempts, but he passed for only 176 yards because he threw underneath all night. His longest completion was good for only 18 yards, although it went for a touchdown to Derrius Thompson. Feeley was sacked twice and again didn't show a great feel for sensing pressure in the pocket. The positive news was that Feeley wasn't intercepted. Feeley also deserves credit for leading the Dolphins on a game-winning drive, although 18 of the 40 yards gained came on running plays. **Grade: C**

RUNNING BACKS

The Dolphins running game had one of its most productive outings, with 116 yards and a 4.6 average. Sammy Morris led the way with 69 yards on 17 carries, and he had a big 13-yard run on third-and-2 on the game-winning drive. Morris also caught three passes. Travis Minor also had success on the ground, rushing for 30 yards on six carries. Minor, who also had a long run of 13 yards, caught two passes, while fullback Jamar Martin added one reception. **Grade: B-**

RECEIVERS

For the second week in a row, Derrius Thompson made a tough catch in the end zone for a touchdown, although this one wasn't nearly as dramatic. Thompson also had a 16-yard reception, but he later dropped an easy pass. Tight end Randy McMichael also dropped a couple of balls, while tight end Donald Lee failed to hang on to the ball after being hit almost immediately after catching the pass. Chris Chambers had a quiet three catches on the evening, but he had the

longest run of the day with a 16-yarder on a reverse. Marty Booker had four catches before leaving the game with an injury, which occurred on a fourth-down reception. **Grade: C+**

OFFENSIVE LINE

The offensive line had another up-and-down performance, particularly in pass protection. In addition to the two sacks against Feeley, he was pressured and forced out of the pocket on a few other occasions. Right tackle John St. Clair allowed penetration on the one sack that resulted in a Feeley fumble and a turnover. The run blocking was pretty solid for the most part, and McKinney deserves mention for his block on Chambers' 16-yard run. There was only one penalty called on the offensive line, a false start on left tackle Damion McIntosh. **Grade: C+**

DEFENSIVE LINE

The defensive line didn't have many opportunities to make plays with their pass rushing because Cleveland was determined to pound the ball all night. Yet defensive end David Bowens came up with one of the biggest plays of the game when he sacked quarterback Luke McCown on Cleveland's last drive. Bowens had an earlier sack wiped out by a holding penalty on Jason Taylor, who was flagged for throwing a receiver to the ground as he was getting off the line of scrimmage. Taylor had a sack earlier in the game and led all defensive linemen with nine tackles. The Browns managed to rush for 142 yards, but their average was under 4 yards per carry. Jeff Zgonina contributed three tackles from the middle of the defensive line, but fellow starting D-tackle Bryan Robinson was very quiet (one assist). **Grade: B**

LINEBACKERS

The Dolphins welcomed Zach Thomas back to

the lineup, and as usual he led the team in tackles, this time with 18. His best play came when he shot through the line and dropped Cleveland running back Lee Suggs for a 2-yard loss. Morlon Greenwood also was active, as he finished with 10 tackles. He also had two passes defended, including one that he came close to intercepting. Brendon Ayanbadejo started for the injured Eddie Moore and finished with four tackles. He had a chance at a fumble recovery but touched the ball after sliding out of bounds, allowing Cleveland to retain possession. This was a solid, though not dominant, effort by this group. **Grade: B-**

DEFENSIVE BACKS

Cornerback Patrick Surtain had an early interception and strong safety Sammy Knight forced and recovered a fumble near the Dolphins goal line to end a Cleveland threat. But then there was a strange play as Arturo Freeman intercepted a deep McCown pass, lateralled to Surtain, who lateralled to Sam Madison, who then fumbled the ball back to the Browns. The Dolphins pass defense wasn't tested often, but there was a breakdown when Dennis Northcutt wound up behind Knight and Surtain on his way to a 58-yard touchdown in the first quarter. **Grade: B-**

SPECIAL TEAMS

Olindo Mare won the game with a 51-yard field goal, which was by far the highlight of a mediocre night on special teams. Among the negatives was allowing a 22-yard punt return to Northcutt. Another was having Mare punt out of field goal formation and watching his 19-yard kick get returned 17 yards for a net of only 2 yards. Punter Matt Turk didn't have a great night, with a gross average of 39.5 and a net of 30.6. Kick returner Wes Welker didn't have any long returns. **Grade: C+**

— Alain Poupart

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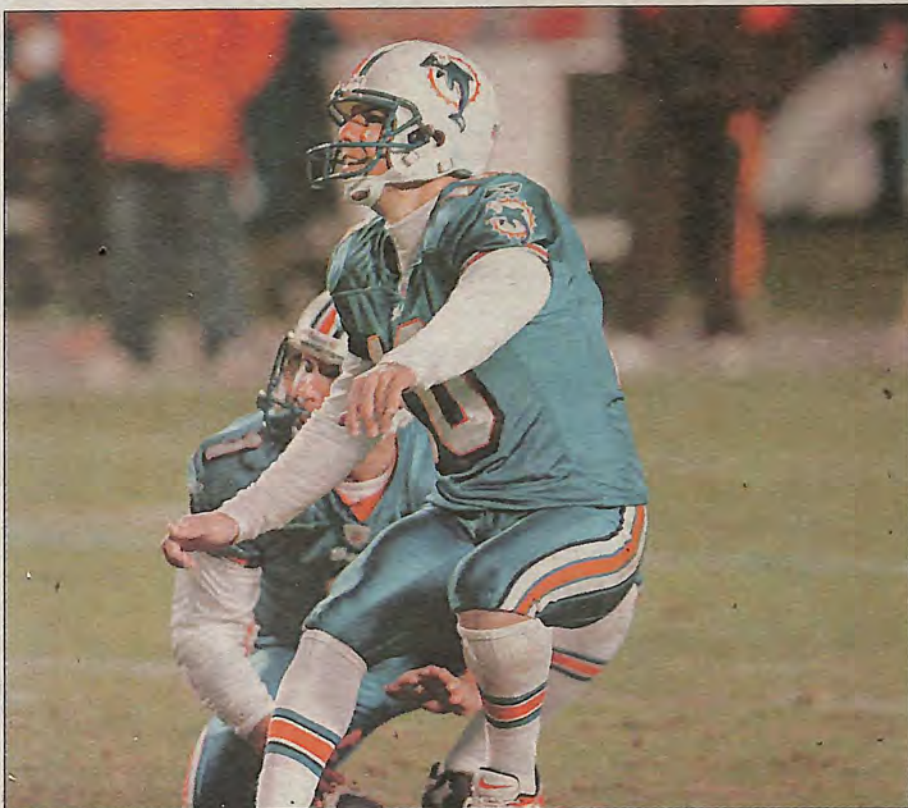
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Kicker Olindo Mare made his first game-winning field goal of the year when he connected on a 51-yarder to give Miami a 10-7 victory over Cleveland.

Digest Photo/KEN KEIDEL

Mare makes most of big opportunity

This was a game where the Dolphins could have separated themselves from one of the worst teams in the league. Instead, they did a pretty good imitation.

The Dolphins fumbled and bumbled and generally looked as anemic as a Cleveland team that had been outscored 100-22 in its last three games.

Fortunately, though, the Dolphins had Olindo Mare.

Mare nailed a 51-yard field goal with seven seconds left to give the Dolphins a less-than-stellar 10-7 victory. It was Mare's first game-winner of the season and the second-longest game-winner of his career, behind only a 53-yarder at Denver in 2002.

"What a tremendous kick by Olindo," said interim coach Jim Bates.

It has been a weird sort of season for Mare. While his field goal percentage is decent — 80 percent on 12 of 15 — he did miss a 22-yarder earlier in the season and sat out five games because of a calf injury. But there he was against the Browns, providing the difference as well as a reminder that the Dolphins can count on him in close games. Unfortunately, they haven't had many of those this season.

"It felt great to get that kick," Mare said. "I don't think anybody wanted to go into overtime. It was frustrating when I missed some games earlier in the season, but now I feel like I'm getting my groove back."

Mare will be one of the most interesting offseason decisions. Do the Dolphins keep his relatively high salary cap number, try to renegotiate

his contract or simply look for another kicker?

The maturation of A.J. Feeley continues. And it isn't always pretty.

Feeley had one of his poorer games against the Browns. His long pass covered only 18 yards and he lost a fumble. More importantly, he led the Dolphins to only one touchdown against a far-from-imposing Cleveland defense.

With one start left in the season, the book on Feeley looks this way.

- Questionable pocket presence. He just doesn't seem in control standing back there.
- Excellent in throwing out patterns.
- Needs work on his short passes, especially in the flat.
- Solid on medium-range throws down the middle where most of his scoring passes have gone.
- Reluctant to throw deep.

Feeley on the Browns game: "I was seeing things real well out there, but at times we kind of stepped on our foot. We made some plays, but we didn't score many points. I thought we'd come out on fire after that first scoring drive, but it didn't turn out that way."

Jim Bates is now 3-3 as coach of the Dolphins.

"We could have easily been 5-1 or 6-0," Bates said. "It's disappointing we're not better than this. But it was important to us to finish this thing on a positive note. We've now won two in a row, beating the defending Super Bowl champs and now beating the Browns. We'd sure like to finish the year with another win."

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PLAYER of the WEEK

SAMMY MORRIS

RUNNING BACK

The Dolphins offense didn't put up big numbers against Cleveland, but Sammy Morris was a big part of the success it did have.

Morris led the running game with 69 yards on 17 carries, including a key 13-yard run to convert a third-and-2 on the game-winning field goal drive. Morris also had a knockdown block on defensive end Michael Myers on a passing play and caught three passes.

For his efforts, Morris is the *Dolphin Digest* Player of the Week.

Others worthy of mention were Olindo Mare, who kicked the game-winning 51-yard field goal; Zach Thomas, who had a team-high 18 tackles; and safety Sammy Knight, who forced two fumbles and recovered one of them.

Digest Photo/RICHARD LEWIS



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GAME SUMMARY

	1	2	3	4	Final
Cleveland	7	0	0	0	7
Miami	7	0	0	3	10

Scoring

1st Quarter: MIA - TD: DERRIUS THOMPSON 18 YD PASS FROM A.J. FEELEY (OLINDO MARE KICK), 6:00. Drive: 5 plays, 49 yards in 1:54. Key Plays: Feeley 7-yard pass to Booker on 3rd-and-2 to Cleveland 34. Chambers 16-yard run to Cleveland 18. **MIAMI 7-0**

CLE - TD: DENNIS NORTHCUTT 58 YD PASS FROM LUKE MCCOWN (PHIL DAWSON KICK), 7:28. Drive: 3 plays, 62 yards in 1:28. **CLEVELAND 7, MIAMI 7**

4th Quarter: MIA - FG: OLINDO MARE 51 YD, 14:53. Drive: 8 plays, 40 yards in 1:42. Key Plays: Feeley 13-yard pass to Gilmore to Miami 41. Morris 13-yard run on 3rd-and-2 to Cleveland 38. **MIAMI 10-7**

Team Statistics

	CLE	MIA
First downs	14	19
Rushing	7	8
Passing	5	10
Penalty	2	1
3rd-Down Efficiency	5-12	8-19
4th-Down Efficiency	0-0	1-1
Total Net Yards	285	280
Total Plays	58	71
Average Gains	4.9	3.9
Net Yards Rushing	142	116
Rushes	40	25
Average Per Rush	3.6	4.6
Net Yards Passing	143	164
Completed-Attempted	9-16	25-44
Yards Per Pass	7.9	3.6
Sacked-Yards Lost	2-18	2-12
Had Intercepted	2	0
Punts-Average	6-42.3	9-37.2
Return Yardage	48	37
Punts>Returns	3-48	3-37
Kickoffs>Returns	3-51	2-48
Interceptions>Returns	0-0	2-0
Penalties-Yards	5-25	7-35
Fumbles-Lost	4-2	3-2
Time Of Possession	30:26	29:34

Cleveland Browns Player Statistics

Missed field goals: Phil Dawson 43

Rushing: Lee Suggs 38-143, Luke McCown 2-minus 1

Passing: Luke McCown 9-16 for 161 yards, 1 TD, 2 INT
Receiving: Dennis Northcutt 4-114, Antonio Bryant 2-15, Steve Holden 1-27, Lee Suggs 1-4, Keith Heinrich 1-1

Punt Returns: Dennis Northcutt 3 for 48 yards

Fumbles Lost: Richard Alston 1, Lee Suggs 1

Opponent's Fumbles Recovered: Melvin Fowler, Chaun Thompson

Miami Dolphins Player Statistics

Rushing: Sammy Morris 17-69, Travis Minor 6-30, Chris Chambers 1-16, Vick King 1-1

Passing: A.J. Feeley 25-43 for 176 yards, 1 TD, 0 INT; Sage Rosenfels 0-1 for 0 yards, 0 TD, 0 INT

Receiving: Randy McMichael 9-59, Marty Booker 4-31, Chris Chambers 3-25, Sammy Morris 3-5, Derrius Thompson 2-34, Travis Minor 2-4, Bryan Gilmore 1-13, Jamar Martin 1-5

Interceptions: Patrick Surtain 1 for 2 yards, Arturo Freeman 1 for 1 yards

Punt Returns: Wes Welker 3 for 37 yards

Fumbles Lost: A.J. Feeley 1, Sam Madison 1

Opponent's Fumbles Recovered: Reggie Howard, Sammy Knight

DOLPHINS STATISTICS

REGULAR SEASON

Sept. 12	L	7-17	TENNESSEE
Sept. 19	L	13-16	at Cincinnati
Sept. 26	L	3-13	PITTSBURGH
Oct. 3	L	9-17	N.Y. JETS
Oct. 10	L	10-24	at New England
Oct. 17	L	13-20	at Buffalo
Oct. 24	W	31-14	ST. LOUIS
Nov. 1	L	14-41	at N.Y. Jets
Nov. 7	L	23-24	ARIZONA
Nov. 14			BYE
Nov. 21	L	17-24	at Seattle
Nov. 28	W	24-17	at San Francisco
Dec. 5	L	32-42	BUFFALO
Dec. 12	L	17-20	at Denver
Dec. 20	W	29-28	NEW ENGLAND
Dec. 27	W	10-7	CLEVELAND
Jan. 2			at Baltimore

Total First Downs

Rushing	65
Passing	156
Penalty	28
3rd Down: Made/Att	76/219
3rd Down Pct.	34.7%
4th Down: Made/Att	8/16
4th Down Pct.	50.0%
Possession Avg.	28:25
Total Net Yards	4059
Avg. Per Game	270.6
Total Plays	961
Avg. Per Play	4.2
Net Yards Rushing	1242
Avg. Per Game	82.8
Total Rushes	364
Net Yards Passing	2817
Avg. Per Game	187.8
Sacked/Yards Lost	49/310
Gross Yards	3127
Attempts/Completions	548/293
Completion Pct.	53.5%
Had Intercepted	23
Punts/Average	94/41.9
Net Punting Avg.	37.3
Penalties/Yards	108/807
Fumbles/Ball Lost	40/16
Touchdowns	28
Rushing	9
Passing	18
Returns	1

Score By Periods

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	OT	Pts
Team	72	59	20	101	0	252
Opponents	72	75	85	92	0	324

Scoring

	TD	Ru	Pa	Rt	PAT	FG	2Pt	Pts
O.Mare	0	0	0	0	15/15	12/15	0	51
C.Chambers	6	0	6	0	0/0	0/0	1	38
S.Morris	5	5	0	0	0/0	0/0	0	30
R.McMichael	4	0	4	0	0/0	0/0	1	26
D.Thompson	4	0	4	0	0/0	0/0	0	24
T.Minor	3	3	0	0	0/0	0/0	0	18
M.Bryant	0	0	0	0	7/7	3/3	0	16
B.Gramatica	0	0	0	0	0/1	3/3	0	9
A.Feeley	1	1	0	0	0/0	0/0	0	6
D.Pope	1	0	0	1	0/0	0/0	0	6
B.Gilmore	1	0	1	0	0/0	0/0	0	6
R.Konrad	1	0	1	0	0/0	0/0	0	6
M.Booker	1	0	1	0	0/0	0/0	0	6
D.Lee	1	0	1	0	0/0	0/0	0	6
W.Welker	0	0	0	0	1/1	1/1	0	4
Team	28	9	18	1	23/24	19/22	2	252
Opponents	39	11	19	9	39/39	17/25	0	324

2-Pt. Conversions: Team 2/4, Opponents: 0/0

Sacks: J.Taylor 9.5, D.Bowens 7.0, J.Zgonina 5.0, D.Romero 3.5, Z.Thomas 2.0, J.Williams 2.0, D.Pope 2.0, P.Surtain 1.0, J.Seau 1.0, A.Edwards 1.0, C.Ahanotu 1.0, W.Poole 1.0. **Team: 36.0, Opponents: 49.0**

Passing

	Att	Cmp	Yds	Cmp%	Yds/Att	TD	TD%	Int	Int%	Long	Sack	Lost	Rating
A.Feeley	356	191	1893	53.7%	5.3	11	3.1%	15	4.2%	38	23	136	61.7
J.Fiedler	190	101	1186	53.2%	6.2	7	3.7%	8	4.2%	71t	25	165	67.1
M.Booker	1	1	48	100.0%	48.0	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	48	0	0	118.8
S.Rosenfels	1	0	0	0.0%	0.0	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0	0	39.6
S.Morris	0	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	1	9	0.0
Team	548	293	3127	53.5%	5.7	18	3.3%	23	4.2%	71t	49	310	63.9

AFC EAST STANDINGS

	W	L	T	PCT.	PF	PA	HOME	AWAY	DIV
New England	13	2	0	.867	416	253	7-0	6-2	5-1
N.Y. Jets	10	5	0	.667	304	229	6-2	4-3	3-3
Buffalo	9	6	0	.600	371	255	5-2	4-4	3-3
Miami	4	11	0	.266	252	324	3-5	1-6	1-5

Rushing

	No.	Yds	Avg	Long	TD
S.Morris	120	434	3.6	25	5
T.Minor	102	387	3.8	34	3
L.Henry	45	134	3.0	53	0
C.Chambers	9	76	8.4	24	0
L.Gordon	35	64	1.8	11	0
J.Fiedler	12	59	4.9	26	0
B.Forsey	19	53	2.8	15	0
R.Konrad	2	18	9.0	15	0
A.Feeley	14	13	0.9	7t	1
V.King	4	9	2.3	3	0
M.Turk	1	3	3.0	3	0
M.Booker	1	-8	-8.0	-8	0
Team	364	1242	3.4	53	9
Opponents	498	2112	4.2	62	11

Receiving

	No.	Yds	Avg	Long	TD
R.McMichael	71	786	11.1	42t	4
C.Chambers	65	752	11.6	71t	6
M.Booker	50	638	12.8	45	1
D.Thompson	22	346	15.7	36	4
S.Morris	21	111	5.3	24	0
L.Gordon	13	74	5.7	20	0
B.Gilmore	12	159	13.3	37	1
T.Minor	12	68	5.7	20	0
D.Lee	10	85	8.5	15t	1
R.Konrad	8	69	8.6	20t	1
J.Martin	4	15	3.8	7	0
L.Henry	3	12	4.0	7	0
V.King	1	8	8.0	8	0
D.Easlick	1	4	4.0	4	0
Team	293	3127	10.7	71t	18
Opponents	230	2673	11.6	69t	19

Interceptions

	No.	Yds	Avg	Long	TD
A.Freeman	4	59	14.8	47	0
S.Knight	4	32	8.0	32	0
P.Surtain	4	2	0.5	2	0
B.Ayanbadejo	1	2	2.0	2	0
J.Williams	1	0	0.0	0	0
J.Taylor	1	-3	-3.0	-3	0
Team	15	92	6.1	47	0
Opponents	23	416	18.1	66t	7

Punting

	No	Yds	Avg	Net	TB	In	Lg	B
M.Turk	93	3915	42.1	37.7	10	27	67	0
O.Mare	1	19	19.0	2.0	0	0	19	0
Team	94	3934	41.9	37.3	10	27	67	0
Opponents	96	3945	41.1	33.4	10	28	63	0

Punt Returns

	Ret	FC	Yds	Avg	Long	TD
W.Welker	40	10	436	10.9	71	0
L.Brightful	9	2	89	9.9	36	0
B.Gilmore	0	0	11	0	11	0
Team	49	12	536	10.9	71	0
Opponents	43	17	226	5.3	24	0

Kickoff Returns

	No.	Yds	Avg	Long	TD
W.Welker	50	1103	22.1	35	0
L.Brightful	5	126	25.2	32	0
B.Gilmore	5	114	22.8	53	0
J.Wyrick	1	58	58.0	58	0
W.Poole	1	22	22.0	22	0
Team	62	1423	23.0	58	0
Opponents	47	1036	22.0	104t	1

Field Goals

	1-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50+
O.Mare	0/0	1/2	6/7	3/4	2/2
B.Gramatica	0/0	2/2	1/1	0/0	0/0
B.Bryant	0/0	1/1	0/0	2/2	0/0
M.Taylor	0/0	6/7	7/8	5/6	2/2
Opponents	1/1	4/4	3/6	6/11	3/3



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The Greatest Passing Season Ever

Dan Marino was almost unstoppable. So were the Marks Brothers. The 1984 Miami Dolphins set some passing records that stood for two decades and others that may never be duplicated. Dolphin Digest wraps up its salute of that accomplishment as we look back at the final two games in that remarkable season that saw Marino set NFL records with 5,084 passing yards, 48 touchdowns and 362 completions.

• WEEK 15

Dolphins at Indianapolis

MARINO'S STATS

29 of 41, 404 yards,
4 touchdowns, 1 interception

Setting the stage: Having lost two of their last three, the Dolphins welcomed the opportunity to face a Colts team that sported the worst offense in the NFL. Indianapolis came into the game with a 4-10 record and was coming off a loss to the lowly Bills.

Final score: Miami 35, Indianapolis 17

It came to pass: The four touchdown passes went to four different receivers — Mark Clayton, Jimmy Ce-

falo, Bruce Hardy and Nat Moore. ... Clayton was Marino's favorite target with nine catches for 127 yards. ... The Dolphins trailed 17-7 when Marino's last pass of the first half on third-and-goal from the 10 was intercepted by Eugene Daniel. ... Marino bounced back by completing his first 10 passes of the second half. ... The streak ended when Clayton caught a pass out of bounds. ... Marino was 17-of-21 for 225 yards with all four touchdowns in the second half. ... Eight different receivers caught passes.

The challenge ahead: The Dolphins were closing the regular season with a Monday night game against the Dallas Cowboys at the Orange Bowl.

CHASING THE RECORDS

Dan Marino's 1984 season totals compared to those who held the records for most passing yards (Dan Fouts, 1981), touchdowns (George Blanda, 1961 and Y.A. Tittle, 1963) and completions (Fouts, 1981). Bold indicates record Marino would break that season.

	Comp.	Att.	Yds.	TD	INT
Marino's season totals	339	524	4744	44	15
Fouts' 1981 season totals	346	582	4580	32	17
Blanda's 1961 final season totals	187	358	3301	36	23
Tittle's 1963 final season totals	221	367	3145	36	14

... A look back 20 years later



The Dolphins turned a halftime deficit at Indianapolis into an easy victory thanks to Dan Marino's almost-flawless second-half performance.

WEEK 16

Dallas at Miami

MARINO'S STATS

23 of 40, 340 yards,
4 touchdowns, 2 interceptions

Setting the stage: A lot was at stake when the Dolphins played host to the Cowboys on the last Monday night game of the 1984 regular season. In addition to Marino's pursuit of the passing records, the Dolphins needed a victory to clinch home-field advantage throughout the AFC playoffs, while Dallas needed a win just to make the playoffs.

Final score: Miami 28, Dallas 21

It came to pass: Marino set the sin-

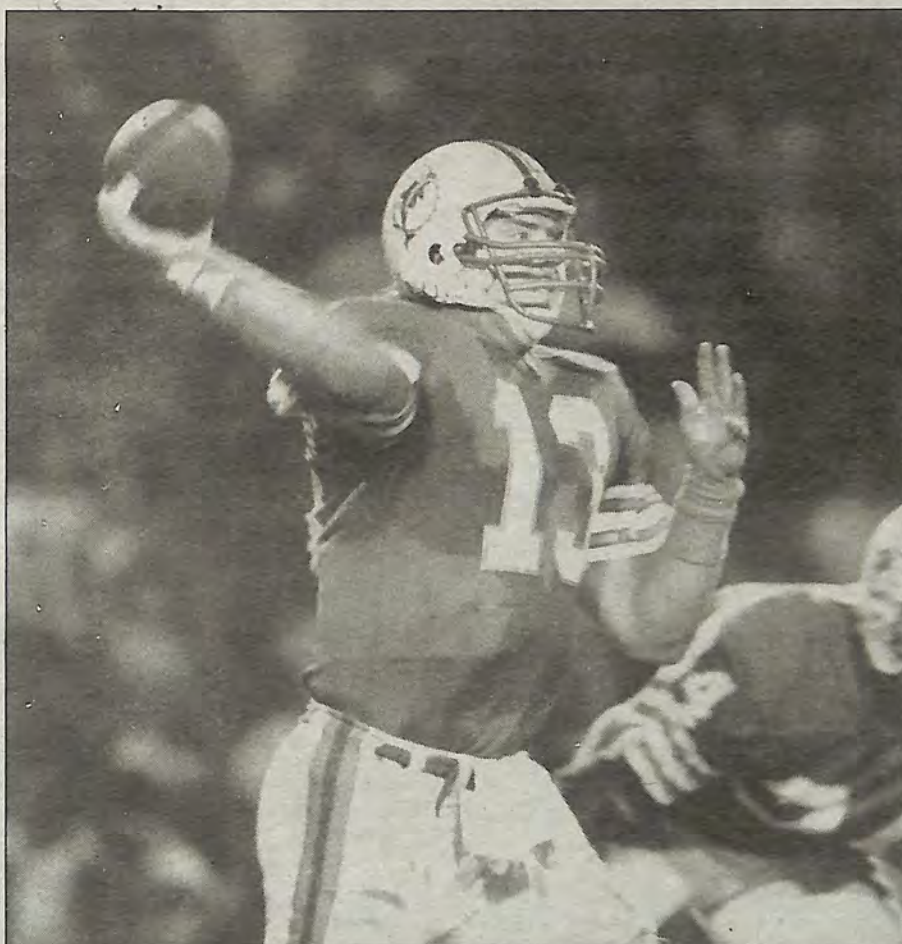
gle-season yardage record on a 22-yard pass to Nat Moore in the second quarter and the completion record on a 15-yard pass to Tony Nathan in the third quarter. ... Mark Clayton set an NFL single-season record with 18 TD catches with a game-winning 63-yard reception, his third score of the game. ... Marino completed passes to seven different receivers. ... Nathan led the way with seven catches for 46 yards.

The challenge ahead: The Dolphins would go on to overwhelm AFC playoff opponents Seattle and Pittsburgh, but the 49ers ended their dream in Super Bowl XIX. Marino would never get to play in another Super Bowl, but he would go on to set NFL career records for passing yards, touchdowns, attempts and completions.

CHASING THE RECORDS

Dan Marino's 1984 season totals compared to those who held the records for most passing yards (Dan Fouts, 1981), touchdowns (George Blanda, 1961 and Y.A. Tittle, 1963) and completions (Fouts, 1981). Bold indicates record Marino broke that season.

	Comp.	Att.	Yds.	TD	INT
Marino's season totals	362	564	5084	48	17
Fouts' 1981 season totals	360	609	4802	33	17
Blanda's 1961 final season totals	187	358	3301	36	23
Tittle's 1963 final season totals	221	367	3145	36	14



Dan Marino closed out his record-setting season in style against Dallas, throwing a late game-winning touchdown pass to Mark Clayton.

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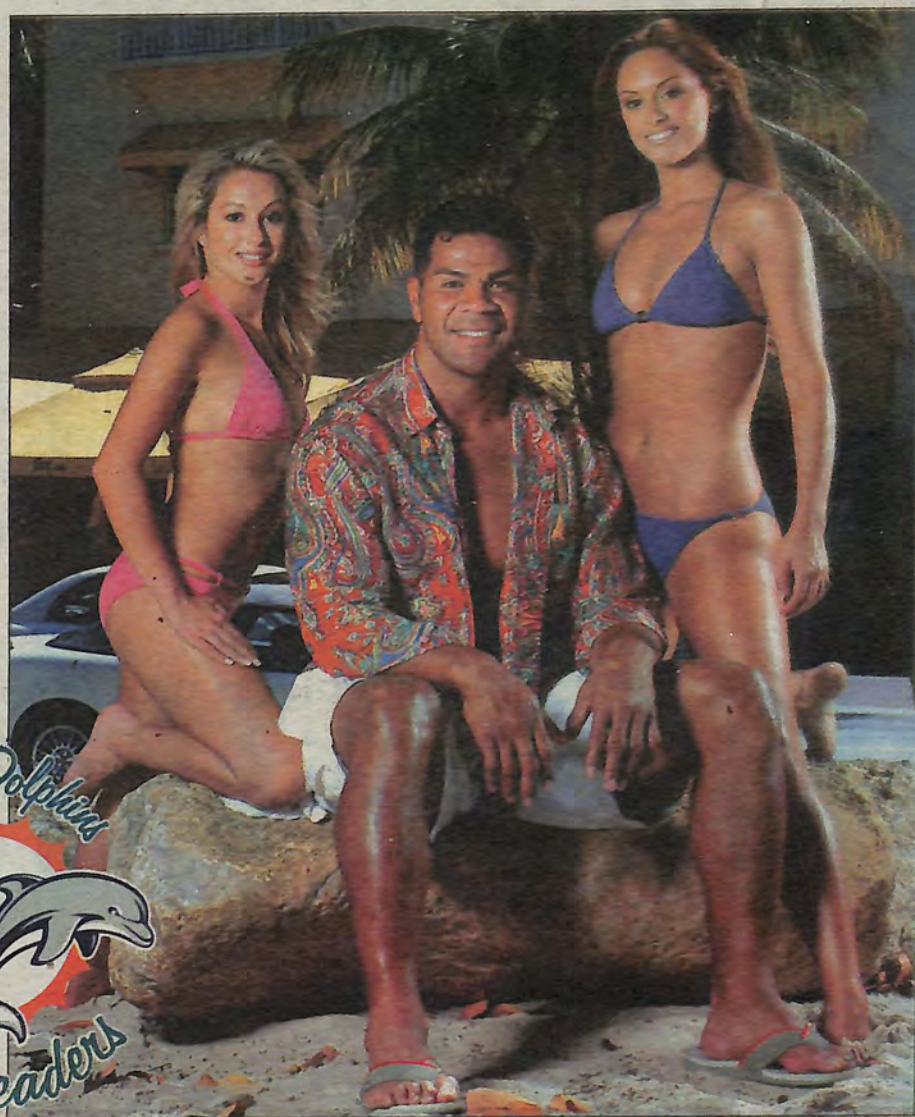
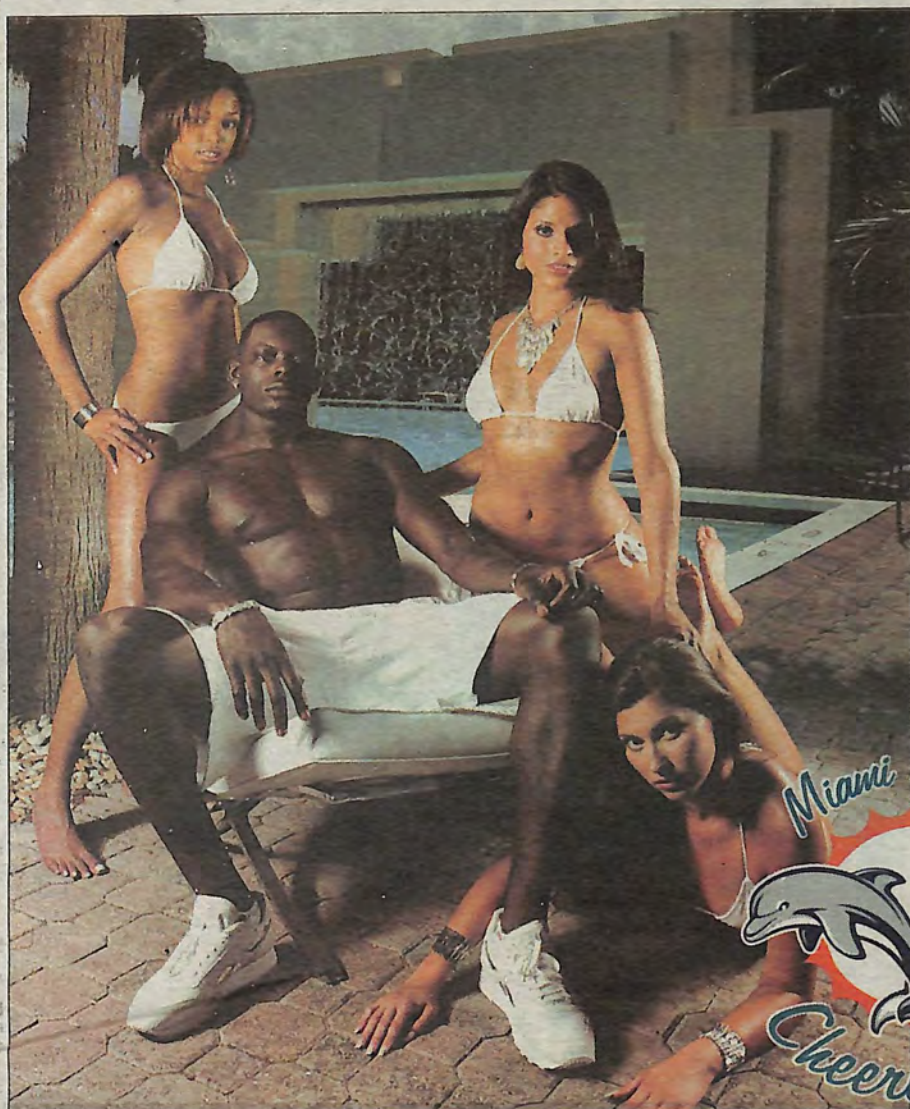
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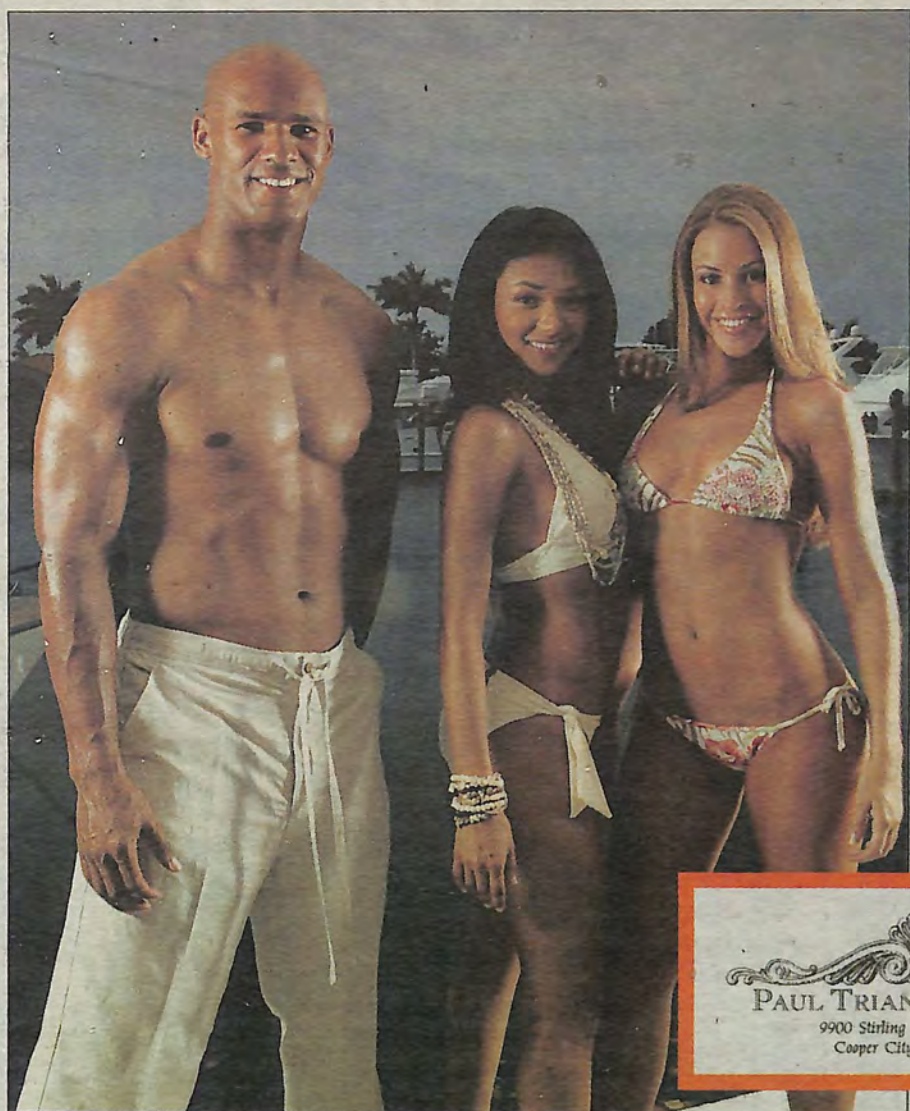


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Dolphins cheerleaders posed with players for the 2004 calendar. Clockwise from top left, Lauren, Maria and Anna with Chris Chambers; Jackie and LauRen with Junior Seau; Jessica, Alexis and Brandii with Olindo Mare; Brenda and Jackie with Jason Taylor.



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Miami Dolphins



Baltimore Ravens

No.	Name	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Exp.	College
1	Matt Turk	P	6-5	235	10	Wis.-Whitewater
7	A.J. Feeley	QB	6-3	225	4	Oregon
10	Olindo Mare	K	5-10	195	8	Syracuse
16	Maurice Mann	WR	6-2	191	R	Nevada
17	Jason Garrett	QB	6-2	205	12	Princeton
18	Sage Rosenfels	QB	6-4	222	4	Iowa State
20	Arturo Freeman	S	6-1	210	5	South Carolina
23	Patrick Surtain	CB	5-11	192	7	Southern Miss
24	Sammy Knight	S	6-0	215	8	USC
25	Reggie Howard	CB	6-0	190	5	Memphis
27	Will Poole	CB	5-10	193	R	USC
28	Travis Minor	RB	5-10	205	4	Florida State
29	Sam Madison	CB	5-11	185	8	Louisville
31	Sammy Morris	RB	6-0	220	5	Texas Tech
32	Jamar Martin	FB	5-11	256	3	Ohio State
33	Vick King	RB	5-10	215	R	McNeese State
35	Jimmy Wyrick	CB	5-9	176	5	Minnesota
38	Quintin Williams	S	5-11	204	R	Wake Forest
42	James Lynch	FB	5-11	272	1	Maryland
43	Brock Forsey	RB	5-11	210	2	Boise State
45	Deandre Eiland	DB	5-11	202	R	South Carolina
50	Brendon Ayanbadejo	LB	6-1	230	2	UCLA
52	Morlon Greenwood	LB	6-0	238	4	Syracuse
54	Zach Thomas	LB	5-11	230	9	Texas Tech
56	Derrick Pope	LB	5-11	233	R	Alabama
57	Corey Jenkins	LB	6-0	222	2	South Carolina
58	Eddie Moore	LB	6-0	230	2	Tennessee
59	Billy Strother	LB	6-0	230	R	New Mexico
60	Greg Jerman	G	6-5	310	3	Baylor
66	Rex Hadnot	C/G	6-2	323	R	Houston
68	Seth McKinney	C	6-3	305	3	Texas A&M
69	Taylor Whitley	G	6-4	315	2	Texas A&M
70	John St. Clair	T	6-4	315	5	Virginia
72	Vernon Carey	T	6-5	325	R	Miami (Fla.)
74	Wade Smith	T	6-4	315	2	Memphis
75	Josh Shaw	DT	6-2	290	2	Michigan State
77	Damion McIntosh	T	6-4	325	5	Kansas State
78	Jeno James	G	6-3	315	5	Auburn
81	Randy McMichael	TE	6-3	250	3	Georgia
82	Bryan Gilmore	WR	6-0	195	4	Midwestern State
83	Wes Welker	WR/KR	5-9	190	R	Texas Tech
84	Chris Chambers	WR	5-11	210	4	Wisconsin
85	Donald Lee	TE	6-3	255	2	Mississippi State
86	Marty Booker	WR	6-0	212	6	Louisiana-Monroe
88	Derrius Thompson	WR	6-2	220	6	Baylor
89	Ed Perry	TE	6-4	265	8	James Madison
90	Jeff Zgonina	DT	6-2	285	12	Purdue
91	Jay Williams	DE	6-3	270	10	Wake Forest
93	Mario Monds	DT	6-3	342	2	Cincinnati
94	Dario Romero	DT	6-3	305	3	Eastern Washington
96	David Bowens	DE	6-3	260	5	Western Illinois
98	Bryan Robinson	DL	6-4	296	8	Fresno State
99	Jason Taylor	DE	6-6	255	8	Akron

DOLPHINS DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE			
QB	7-A.J. Feeley	18-Sage Rosenfels	17-Jason Garrett
HB	31-Sammy Morris	28-Travis Minor	33-Vick King
FB	32-Jamar Martin	42-James Lynch	
WR	86-Marty Booker	88-Derrius Thompson	16-Maurice Mann
WR	84-Chris Chambers	82-Bryan Gilmore	
TE	81-Randy McMichael	85-Donald Lee	89-Ed Perry
LT	77-Damion McIntosh	74-Wade Smith	
LG	78-Jeno James	60-Greg Jerman	
C	68-Seth McKinney	66-Rex Hadnot	
RG	66-Rex Hadnot	69-Taylor Whitley	
RT	70-John St. Clair	72-Vernon Carey	
DEFENSE			
LE	96-David Bowens		
LT	98-Bryan Robinson	93-Mario Monds	75-Josh Shaw
RT	90-Jeff Zgonina	94-Dario Romero	
RE	99-Jason Taylor	91-Jay Williams	
WLB	50-Brendon Ayanbadejo	57-Corey Jenkins	58-Eddie Moore (inj.)
MLB	54-Zach Thomas	56-Derrick Pope	
SLB	52-Morlon Greenwood	59-Billy Strother	
RCB	29-Sam Madison	27-Will Poole	35-Jimmy Wyrick
LCB	23-Patrick Surtain	25-Reggie Howard	
FS	20-Arturo Freeman	45-Deandre Eiland	
SS	24-Sammy Knight	45-Deandre Eiland	
SPECIALISTS			
P	1-Matt Turk		
K	10-Olindo Mare		

No.	Name	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Exp.	College
2	Anthony Wright	QB	6-1	215	6	South Carolina
3	Matt Stover	K	5-11	178	15	Louisiana Tech
7	Kyle Boller	QB	6-3	220	2	California
9	Wade Richey	K	6-3	205	7	LSU
10	Kordell Stewart	QB	6-1	218	10	Colorado
15	Dave Zastudil	P	6-3	215	3	Ohio University
20	Ed Reed	S	5-11	200	3	Miami (Fla.)
21	Chris McAlister	CB	6-1	206	6	Arizona
24	Corey Fuller	CB	5-10	220	10	Florida State
28	Gary Baxter	CB	6-2	215	4	Baylor
29	Chester Taylor	RB	5-11	213	3	Toledo
30	Jamel White	RB	5-9	222	5	South Dakota
31	Jamal Lewis	RB	5-11	245	5	Tennessee
33	Harold Morrow	FB	5-11	232	10	Auburn
36	B.J. Sams	RB	5-10	185	R	McNeese State
37	Deion Sanders	CB	6-1	198	13	Florida State
38	Raymond Walls	CB	5-10	188	4	*Southern Miss
39	Alan Ricard	FB	5-11	237	4	Northeast Louisiana
44	Daniel Wilcox	TE	6-1	245	2	Appalachian State
47	Will Demps	S	6-0	205	3	San Diego State
49	Chad Williams	S	5-9	207	3	Southern Miss
52	Ray Lewis	LB	6-1	245	9	Miami (Fla.)
53	T.J. Slaughter	LB	6-0	233	5	Southern Miss
54	Roderick Green	LB	6-2	250	R	Central Missouri State
55	Terrell Suggs	LB	6-3	260	2	Arizona State
56	Edgerton Hartwell	LB	6-1	250	4	Western Illinois
57	Bart Scott	LB	6-2	235	3	Southern Illinois
59	Joe Maese	LS	6-0	245	4	New Mexico
61	Casey Rabach	G/C	6-4	301	4	Wisconsin
62	Mike Flynn	C	6-3	305	7	Maine
64	Edwin Mulitalo	G	6-3	345	6	Arizona
66	Bennie Anderson	G	6-5	345	4	Tennessee State
69	Brian Rimpf	G	6-5	319	R	East Carolina
75	Jonathan Ogden	OT	6-9	345	9	UCLA
77	Ethan Brooks	OT	6-6	330	7	Williams College
78	Orlando Brown	OT	6-7	360	9	South Carolina State
79	Tony Pashos	OT	6-6	337	2	Illinois
80	Randy Hymes	WR	6-3	211	3	Grambling
82	Terry Jones	TE	6-3	260	3	Alabama
84	Clarence Moore	WR	6-6	211	R	Northern Arizona
85	Kevin Johnson	WR	5-11	195	6	Syracuse
86	Todd Heap	TE	6-5	252	4	Arizona State
87	Darnell Dinkins	TE	6-2	255	3	Pittsburgh
89	Travis Taylor	WR	6-1	210	5	Florida
90	Cornell Brown	LB	6-0	240	7	Virginia Tech
91	Aubrayo Franklin	DT	6-1	320	2	Tennessee
92	Maake Kempeatu	DT	6-5	340	3	Utah
93	Dwan Edwards	DT	6-3	315	R	Oregon State
94	Marques Douglas	DE	6-2	280	5	Howard
95	Jarret Johnson	DE	6-3	285	2	Alabama
96	Adalius Thomas	DE	6-2	270	5	Southern Miss
97	Kelly Gregg	DT	6-0	310	5	Oklahoma
98	Anthony Weaver	DE	6-3	290	3	Notre Dame

RAVENS DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE			
QB	7-Kyle Boller	10-Kordell Stewart	2-Anthony Wright
RB	31-Jamal Lewis	29-Chester Taylor	30-Jamel White
FB	39-Aian Ricard	33-Harold Morrow	
WR	89-Travis Taylor	80-Randy Hymes	
WR	84-Clarence Moore	85-Kevin Johnson	
TE	86-Todd Heap	82-Terry Jones	44-Daniel Wilcox
LT	75-Jonathan Ogden	77-Ethan Brooks	79-Tony Pashos
LG	64-Edwin Mulitalo	62-Mike Flynn	69-Brian Rimpf
C	61-Casey Rabach	62-Mike Flynn	
RG	62-Mike Flynn	66-Bennie Anderson	69-Brian Rimpf
RT	77-Ethan Brooks	78-Orlando Brown	
DEFENSE			
RE	94-Marques Douglas	95-Jarret Johnson	
NT	97-Kelly Gregg	92-Maake Kempeatu	91-Aubrayo Franklin
LE	98-Anthony Weaver	93-Dwan Edwards	
ROLB	96-Adalius Thomas	90-Cornell Brown	
RILB	52-Ray Lewis	57-Bart Scott	
LILB	56-Ed Hartwell	53-T.J. Slaughter	
LOLB	55-Terrell Suggs	90-Cornell Brown	54-Roderick Green
RCB	28-Gary Baxter	37-Deion Sanders	
FS	47-Will Demps	24-Corey Fuller	
SS	20-Ed Reed	49-Chad Williams	
LCB	21-Chris McAlister	38-Raymond Walls	
SPECIALISTS			
P	15-Dave Zastudil		
K	3-Matt Stover		

Countdown to Kickoff

MIAMI DOLPHINS vs. BALTIMORE RAVENS

GAME FACTS

• **DATE**.....Jan. 2, 2004
 • **TIME**.....1 p.m.
 • **SITE**.....M&T Bank Stadium
 • **TV**.....CBS

THE SERIES

The teams have met five times since the Baltimore Ravens came into existence in 1996, and the Dolphins hold a 4-1 advantage. Unfortunately, the one loss came in the 2001 playoffs when the Ravens left Pro Player Stadium with a 20-3 victory. The teams have met only once at Baltimore, with the Dolphins taking a 24-13 decision in 1997. The Dolphins have held Baltimore to seven points or less in three of the five meetings.

LAST MEETING

It was a sloppy, defensive struggle at Pro Player Stadium Nov. 16, 2003 when the Dolphins pulled out a 9-6 overtime victory. The Dolphins won on a 43-yard field goal by Olindo Mare, who had missed a 48-yard attempt wide right with 2:29 left in the fourth quarter. The winning field goal was set up by a Zach Thomas fumble recovery at the Baltimore 33-yard line after a bad exchange between quarterback Anthony Wright and running back Jamal Lewis. Baltimore had a chance to take the lead in the fourth quarter after getting a first down at the Miami 36, but safety Sammy Knight ended the threat with an interception. It was the Dolphins' first overtime victory since 1998.

SERIES SNAPSHOT



KAREEM OF THE CROP — Running back Karim Abdul-Jabbar was practically a one-man show on the Dolphins' last visit to Baltimore Oct. 19, 1997 as he rushed for 108 yards and three touchdowns to lead Miami to a 24-13 victory. Abdul-Jabbar's big day helped him set a Dolphins record that season with 15 rushing touchdowns — a mark that since has been broken. The defense gave up 385 yards to Vinny Testaverde and the Ravens offense that day, but fumble recoveries by Trace Armstrong and Derrick Rodgers proved key. The victory at Baltimore gave the Dolphins a 5-2 record on their way to a 9-7 finish and their first of three playoff berths under Jimmy Johnson.

PLAYERS TO WATCH

- **RB Jamal Lewis** — After rushing for over 2,000 yards last season, Lewis has been slowed by legal troubles and minor injuries in 2004. But he remains one of the top backs in the league.
- **LB Ray Lewis** — Lewis has long had the reputation as being the best defensive player in the game, and there are some who feel he might be overrated. But there's no denying his ability.
- **FS Ed Reed** — Leading the NFL with eight interceptions through 14 games, Reed is perhaps the leading contender for NFL Defensive Player of the Year honors.
- **KR B.J. Sams** — After beating out Lamont Brightful, who went on to have an ill-fated stint with the Dolphins, Sams has made his mark as a rookie with two punt returns for touchdowns through 14 games.

STAT OF THE WEEK

ROAD WRAP-UPS

This will mark the 11th time in franchise history the Dolphins close the season the road. The first 10 looks like this:

Year	Opponent	Result
2002	New England	L, 24-27*
2000	New England	W, 27-24
1999	Washington	L, 10-21
1998	Atlanta	L, 16-38
1996	N.Y. Jets	W, 31-28
1995	St. Louis	W, 41-22
1993	New England	L, 27-33*
1992	New England	W, 16-13*
1988	Pittsburgh	L, 24-40
1982	Baltimore	W, 34-7

*-overtime

WHEN THE DOLPHINS HAVE THE BALL

It might not be quite as good as the Ravens' record-setting unit of 2000, but the Baltimore defense is still among the best in the league. Middle linebacker Ray Lewis remains the most recognizable figure on the defense, but it's safety Ed Reed who keeps making big plays week after week. And cornerback Chris McAlister was ranked by Chris Chambers as one of the two toughest he has faced. The Dolphins also need to be weary of pass-rushing specialist Terrell Suggs, who is among the sack leaders in the AFC. Given the Dolphins' problems on offense this season, they won't be expected to move the ball in this game.

WHEN THE RAVENS HAVE THE BALL

Baltimore won a Super Bowl with a one-dimensional offense a few years ago, and things haven't changed. The Ravens have a very effective running game, thanks to Jamal Lewis and a physical offensive line. Chester Taylor is among the best backup halfbacks in the league. The Dolphins have had problems stopping the run at times this season, so this will be a big challenge. If the Dolphins can shut down the running game, they will force the Ravens to throw, which they don't do well. Quarterback Kyle Boller is erratic and the Baltimore receiving corps isn't that impressive once you get past tight end Todd Heap.

Last Week

The Ravens' playoff hopes took another hit as they dropped a 20-7 decision at Pittsburgh. Baltimore couldn't run (71 yards) or stop the run (183), as they lost for the third time in its last five games. The Ravens controlled the ball for over 10 minutes in the first quarter, which ended tied 7-7, but had the ball for only 9:14 in the second half. Kyle Boller threw for 177 yards with one interception in Steelers territory.

THE COACHES

JIM BATES

Before being named Miami's interim head coach, Bates had been an NFL assistant for 13½ seasons, with stops in Atlanta, Cleveland (twice) and Dallas. Bates' only previous head-coaching experience came in 1985 with San Antonio of the USFL.



BRIAN BILLICK

One of the most quotable coaches in the NFL, Billick took over as Ravens head coach in 1999 with the reputation as an offensive mastermind, but it's with defense that he won a Super Bowl in the 2000 season. He made the playoffs in three of his first five seasons.



Last Word

“We've had some things that have gotten us beat, but it doesn't really go beyond that.”

— COACH BRIAN BILLICK ON RAVENS' LATE SLUMP

WIZARD OF GRID

It looked like I was finally going to reach .500 on my picks against the opening line, but the Dolphins did me in! I was 1-2-1 last week, which puts my season record at 28-30-2. Now, with that hurdle still ahead, I can guarantee better results on the final weekend of the regular season and into the playoffs. Of course, as we all know, there are no guarantees, or locks, or must wins or certainties when it comes to handicapping NFL football games. That is why it should not be taken too seriously or for a lot of money.

There are few games that have meaning this week and it is a good week to be very conservative. Wait for the playoffs, when you know both teams will play their best players every down and every little injury does not take players out of the game. Betting on the Falcons without Michael Vick is like betting on the Bulls when Jordan sat out. This Sunday, many star players will be rested or play sparingly and that is an intangible that no handicapper can compute prior to the game.

With that said, here are my guarantees for the final weekend of the regular season:

★★★★Pittsburgh (14-1) at Buffalo (9-6) — The Steelers have clinched home-field advantage throughout the playoffs, while the Bills are fighting for the last playoff berth. Bill Cowher will rest several players here and Ben Roethlisberger probably will not play. It is the perfect spot for the Bills to win this game and the betting public will understand this. Thus, the line will move in Buffalo's favor strongly as

the game gets close. If you can get the Bills at the opening line, do it immediately because the Bills need to win and the Steelers do not. This game will not be close as the Bills win easily. **Buffalo, 28-14.**

★★Cleveland (3-12) at Houston (7-8) — The Texans have the chance to finish at .500 for the first time and even that small incentive is enough to beat the Browns by more than the point spread. The Browns have their bags packed for the offseason, while the Texans put on a show for the home faithful. Lay the points with confidence. **Houston, 31-10.**

★★New Orleans (7-8) at Carolina (7-8) — The winner of this game could earn the final playoff berth in the NFC. The Panthers won the earlier meeting, 32-21, and are rated better on both sides of the football. Despite winning their last two games, the Saints are the worst-rated defensive team in the league and that spells trouble against Jake Delhomme. Go with the home team and the more talented team and you will win, along with the Panthers. **Carolina, 27-20.**

Miami (4-11) at Baltimore (8-7) — Neither team really has a shot to make the playoffs, although the Ravens will be mathematically alive at kickoff. That probably will be enough for Ray Lewis & Co. to intimidate the Dolphins receivers into drops, which will turn into points for the Ravens. With Nick Saban on board after this game, the lame-duck coaching staff and the players on the Miami team have no reason to win this game or stay close. **Baltimore, 27-13.**

PRO FOOTBALL

Sun. Jan. 2 ★ Week 17

OPENING LINE

Official Las Vegas opening lines were not available at press time. The following are estimated lines.

SAN FRANCISCO 49ERS	P-10:00 AM C-12:00 PM E-1:00 PM				
NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS	FOX	14			
PITTSBURGH STEELERS	P-10:00 AM C-12:00 PM E-1:00 PM				
BUFFALO BILLS	CBS	3			
MIAMI DOLPHINS	P-10:00 AM C-12:00 PM E-1:00 PM				
BALTIMORE RAVENS	CBS	9			
MINNESOTA VIKINGS	P-10:00 AM C-12:00 PM E-1:00 PM	2			
WASHINGTON REDSKINS	FOX				
CINCINNATI BENGALS	P-10:00 AM C-12:00 PM E-1:00 PM				
PHILADELPHIA EAGLES	CBS	5½			
GREEN BAY PACKERS	P-10:00 AM C-12:00 PM E-1:00 PM	3			
CHICAGO BEARS	FOX				
NEW ORLEANS SAINTS	P-10:00 AM C-12:00 PM E-1:00 PM				
CAROLINA PANTHERS	FOX	3½			
DETROIT LIONS	P-10:00 AM C-12:00 PM E-1:00 PM				
TENNESSEE TITANS	FOX	1			
NEW YORK JETS	P-10:00 AM C-12:00 PM E-1:00 PM	OFF			
ST. LOUIS RAMS	CBS				
CLEVELAND BROWNS	P-10:00 AM C-12:00 PM E-1:00 PM				
HOUSTON TEXANS	CBS	7			
TAMPA BAY BUCCANEERS	P-1:05 PM C-3:05 PM E-4:05 PM				
ARIZONA CARDINALS	FOX	2			
ATLANTA FALCONS	P-1:05 PM C-3:05 PM E-4:05 PM				
SEATTLE SEAHAWKS	FOX	6			
INDIANAPOLIS COLTS	P-1:15 PM C-3:15 PM E-4:15 PM				
DENVER BRONCOS	CBS	3			
JACKSONVILLE JAGUARS	P-1:15 PM C-3:15 PM E-4:15 PM	PICK			
OAKLAND RAIDERS	CBS				
KANSAS CITY CHIEFS	P-5:35 PM C-7:35 PM E-8:35 PM				
SAN DIEGO CHARGERS	CBS	4½			
DALLAS COWBOYS	P-5:35 PM C-7:35 PM E-8:35 PM				
NEW YORK GIANTS	ESPN	2½			

HATS OFF TO THE NEW YEAR


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